

We are oft reminded of Bismarck's famous dismissal of The Balkans. He said they were not being worth the life of a single Pomeranian musketeer.<sup>1</sup> We know well also Marx's admonition that historical events appear twice, first as tragedy and then as farce.<sup>2</sup> When we put them together for an operation such as Joint Guardian in Kosovo, we get this [cue YouTube video excerpt]: Norwegian troops spoofing the Beach Boy's hit song, "Kokomo" in a cheesy music video travelogue around the break-away province of Serbia.<sup>3</sup>

Closer to home, the American Military's Most Trusted News Source, the Duffel Blog, reported back in December how the "Army Realizes It Left Troops in Kosovo."<sup>4</sup> The satirical website mock-quotes Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey being suddenly reminded of the U.S. military's 15-year mission in Kosovo. "All of a sudden, this commercial aired on AFN [American Forces Network], saying that KFOR [Kosovo Force] was 'ready and relevant' in the 21st Century. And I'm like 'what the hell, we still have troops there?'" Given its lack of notoriety, one might well hope this unmemorable mission is quickly forgotten. However, given its low cost in American casualties and treasure, maybe it is not actually a bad thing if – with

---

<sup>1</sup>Yahoo answers. Apparently, the first reference on Pomeranian bones by Bismarck was in Reichstag speech regarding disputes between Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Empire about Bosnia in 1875/76

Emil Ludwig, "Bismarck, The Story of a Fighter", 1927, p.511

<http://books.google.ba/books?id=Rs1Oby5D...> It was initially Pomeranian musketeer, but grenadier took its place in another speech in 1888. Accessed July 16, 2015 at

<https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100424062915AAMvFsr>

<sup>2</sup>Yahoo Answers states that it's an ironic statement, mocking both Hegel (who introduced the concept) and the events surrounding France at that time. The actual quote is: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce". [From the "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." Source(s): <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>. Yahoo Answers quote accessed July 16, 2015 at

<https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090930103029AABP6Xw>

<sup>3</sup>"Kosovo" YouTube video, accessed July 16, 2015 at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD7UREH\\_rJI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD7UREH_rJI)

<sup>4</sup>"Army Realizes It Left Troops in Kosovo," Duffel Blog, Dec. 6, 2014, accessed at <http://www.duffelblog.com/2014/12/army-kosovo-gen-dempsey/>

apologies to the essayist George Santayana -- we are condemned to repeat this mission elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

We Americans, with our notoriously short collective memory, can afford to be light-hearted about Kosovo. We are bystanders there, not antagonists. This is the least dangerous combat-tax exclusion-zone mission a Soldier is likely to face these days. One can drive off post in a soft-bodied SUV without security convoy escort. One can mingle in the cities without great fear. American flags regularly fly next to Albanian ones. In downtown Pristina, one can drive on Bill Clinton Boulevard and pass the statue of Bill Clinton waving a welcome. It is quite an experience serving in a contingency location where the locals visibly like having us around.

This may all sound like the Norwegians were right with their easy-going Kosovo music video. But behind this stable, "normal" environment lays a hard bought peace, paid for with NATO munitions and Kosovo Albanian lives. In 1999, NATO launched its bombing campaign to curtail the ruthless ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians by Serbian-dominated Yugoslav security forces acting purportedly at the behest of the Belgrade autocrat Slobodan Milosevic.<sup>6</sup> While NATO dropped its explosive arsenal over 78 days in and around Serbia and Kosovo, these security forces intensified their brutal campaign of elimination. The then-Yugoslav army and police could not hurt NATO planes so much, but they could forcibly relocate Kosovo Albanians by busing, trucking or train-carrying them to the Albanian and Macedonian borders for deposit.

---

<sup>5</sup>Yahoo Answers. "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it," from *Reason in Common Sense*, the first volume of his *The Life of Reason*.

<sup>6</sup>Yahoo Answers: Milosevic was on trial for crimes against humanity committed in Kosovo in 1999 and in Croatia between 1991-1992, and genocide in the war crimes in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995. Milosevic, the former president of the former Yugoslavia Slobodan Milosevic died on March 11, 2006, in the detention unit of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (Netherlands), where he was tried on charges of war crimes. Accessed July 16, 2015 at <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100408172000AAsYhmq>

Along the way, they raped thousands of woman and girls. And, for those they could not move, they simply “disappeared” them.

When Belgrade eventually capitulated, her security forces withdrew while the NATO-led peacekeeping troops advanced. Into the security vacuum stepped KFOR, short for Kosovo Forces, which took its initial mandate from UN Security Council Resolution 1244.<sup>7</sup> This resolution, acknowledging the “grave humanitarian situation” and the need to provide for the “safe and free return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes,” formally authorized KFOR.<sup>8</sup> Within this UN mandate, KFOR aimed to deter renewed hostility and threats against Kosovo Albanians by Serbian forces, and to establish and maintain a secure environment in Kosovo, including public safety and civil order. While not intended to grant independence to Kosovo, the resolution did provide for substantial autonomy and self-government in Kosovo.<sup>9</sup> After nearly a decade of Serbian negotiating intransigence, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence in 2008, which the United States subsequently recognized.

What KFOR did – and has continued to do -- was put a lid on the boiling cauldron of ethnicities while reducing the heat to the pot. To ensure a stable legal environment, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 provided the means to eventually establish The European Union Rule of Law Mission, or EULEX, in Kosovo. EULEX employs EU police and civilian resources. It operates under the umbrella of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).<sup>10</sup> From this, Kosovo built legal institutions for the trying of criminal and civil cases, and a professional force of municipal and border police. These police are the nation’s first

---

<sup>7</sup>UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Accessed July 16, 2015 at <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/u990610a.htm>

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>EULEX website, accessed July 16, 2015 at <http://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/>

responders to unrest. EULEX serves as a backup. Only as third responders are Pristina-based KFOR troops employed.

Should all go to hell, KFOR troops mobilize to restore freedom of movement throughout Kosovo and a safe-and-secure environment throughout. American troops fill the majority of the ranks for KFOR's Multi-National Battle Group-East, headquartered at Camp Bondsteel in southern Kosovo, and at NATO's Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny in north central Kosovo. [The French have long departed but their unpronounceable Gallic camp name persists. We dubbed it CMLT and called it good.] We jovially called ourselves, The Maytag Repairmen, the loneliest responders in Kosovo. This is because EULEX and KFOR has so successfully trained the Kosovo Police, or KP, that they rarely call for help.

On numerous occasions in the first half of 2015, for instance, when faced with significant protests and borderline riots, the KP consistently and competently held the line. Their philosophy was to fight until the last man was about to fall and only then radio for backup from EULEX or KFOR. This made sense. A professional force's credibility rests on the confidence of the populace it serves. They want to be seen as the nation's protector, not EULEX or KFOR. When one contrasts this with the dishonorable and cowardly retreat of Iraqi security forces this past year in the face of ISIS, one can't help but respect and admire these Kosovars. NATO may have bought their freedom from Serbian domination, but these people recognize it is up to themselves to keep it.

Paradoxically, even though the Kosovo operation is a mature one and the KP can operate without KFOR hand-holding, the example of Iraqi retreat in the wake of U.S. troops' premature departure, serves to chasten anyone seeking to curtail the KFOR mission prior to a Serbian recognition of Kosovo's independence and the establishment of normal diplomatic relations

between the two. No one wants another Iraq humiliation on their watch. In the big picture of global Army operations since 2001, KFOR service is a low-cost mission, with fewer than 1,000 Soldiers usually pulled from stateside National Guard units for 9-month deployments. They gain significant training benefits from this proverbial “real world mission.” The operative guidance for continuing this mission is best summed up as “better stay now than be sorry later”.

With this background in mind, so long as the U.S. Army is still sending troops to Kosovo, it pays for those mobilized Soldiers to understand the underlying cultural, historical and religious animosities that govern the tempers of Albanians and Serbians in Kosovo. Granted, it has taken a few rotations to realize this vital need and then to institutionalize it. Nineteen rotations to be exact. The recently concluded KFOR Rotation 19 built the first cultural awareness senior leaders’ staff ride. Its purpose is the title of this talk: *Understanding and Enhancing Soldiers' Cultural Sensitivity amid Bitter Multiethnic Conflict in Kosovo*. We chose several key cultural, historic, or religious sites around central Kosovo. These traced their roots as far back as the 1300s before leaping to the last quarter century. In March 2015, nearly 50 commanders and command sergeants major and first sergeants from American and multi-national force contingents boarded a bus from Camp Bondsteel for a day-long tour.

The initial stop was to the field of blackbirds, known to history as Kosovo Polje for the 1389 battle there. The Serbians built a 50-foot stone obelisk in the 1950s to commemorate the battle. The site is poorly maintained but nevertheless is considered a Cultural Monument of Exceptional Importance to Serbia. The details of the fight and the array of the forces are mostly conjecture, lost long ago to the mists of 14<sup>th</sup> century time. What *is* known is that ethnic Serbians – and Albanians and Hungarians and Bosniaks – fought an advancing force of Ottomans

comprised of Turks – and Serbians and Albanians and additional vassals from southern eastern Balkan parts.

The Turk side was mostly Muslim; their opposition predominantly Orthodox Christian.<sup>11</sup> The Turks won the battle, but lost their Sultan, Murat I, to an assassin.<sup>12</sup> Sometime during the battle, the Turks captured Prince Lazar, the leader of the Serbian coalition, and subsequently slew him. His daughter later married the new Sultan, thereby providing protection to the conquered Serbian lands, but the loss itself at Kosovo Polje served as a bitter humiliation to Serbian identity. Centuries of oral history epic poetry lamenting this fate followed.<sup>13</sup>

In the succeeding years, the Serbians, as they evolved into a nationality, kept solace in their Orthodox Christian religion as the key to their identity. The Albanians, forcibly converted but in truth only nominally Muslim, traced their identity to their language. This split, however, gradually exacerbated relations between the two ethnic groups during the 500-years of Ottoman rule and then into the last century of Yugoslav nationhood. Albanians and Serbians viciously fought back and forth in the Balkan wars of 1912, 1913, 1914 and through to the creation of Yugoslavia in the early 1920s. Its modern peak occurred 600 years after the 1389 battle.

---

<sup>11</sup>Those in the Balkans in what is the Kosovo area were ethnic principalities, not nations or states as we understand the term today; the concept of nationality would wait some 500 years for its birth.

<sup>12</sup>His eldest son, the new Sultan, promptly called in his younger brother, slew him, buried his father's entrails near the battlefield, and hurried home with his father's disemboweled corpse to the Ottoman capital in Bursa, Asia Minor, to consolidate his hold on power – and bury the rest his father with full honors as well. A five-minute ride away from the field of blackbirds brought the commanders to the tomb and museum of Sultan Murat I. This small enclosed heritage site contains the remains of Murat's entrails, a 450-year-old mulberry tree, and a converted guest-house museum chronicling the battle and Murat's life. The government of Turkey pays to maintain the grounds. As an aside, Turkey takes its sultans seriously. In 2015, it launched a commando raid into Syria to rescue the remains of the grandfather of the first Ottoman Turk Sultan when that government could not protect it from approaching ISIS militiamen.

<sup>13</sup>Although the Turks now held nominal control of the territory, the loss of their Sultan halted any further advance or consolidation. Not until 1448, when Murat the 2<sup>nd</sup> invaded and fought the Second Battle of Kosovo, did the Turks consolidate their hold and more forcibly convert to Islam the Christian Albanians. The conquered Serbians stubbornly maintained their Orthodox Christian religion.

As this anniversary approached, Yugoslavia saw the “spectacle of the body of Prince Lazar, the Serb national hero who fell at the battle, being processed around the country.”<sup>14</sup> It served as a “warm-up” to Yugoslav strongman, Slobodan Milosevic’s implicit call to arms at the battlefield site, before a reported million Serbians.<sup>15</sup> His speech drew a sharp distinction between the cross and the crescent. He riled up the crowd noting that in the 1389 battle, Serbians lost their way but in 1989, they had finally regained it. He added that Serbians had to fight to retain the purity of that identity: “Wherever Serb blood is spilt, and wherever Serbian bones are buried, this must be Serbian territory.”<sup>16</sup> In a rhetorical flourish, Milosevic had summarily erased Albanians’ part on the Serbian side in the battle. He lumped them together with the Turks as Muslim invaders who had illegitimately seized lands rightfully and allegedly historically belonging to the Serbian people.<sup>17</sup> This was important. The Turks had long since departed, but the Albanians had not -- and they comprised a large majority of Kosovo’s population. This was no historical anomaly. Serbia itself had only incorporated Kosovo and its majority Albanian populace into its governance in 1912 when the Balkans peoples threw off the yoke of Ottoman Turk rule.<sup>18</sup> But the facts did not matter to Milosevic in crafting a 600-year Serbian historical claim to Kosovo.

---

<sup>14</sup>Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, London: Reaktion Books, 2006, p. 34. Lazar is buried in the Church of the Ascension of Jesus at the Ravanica monastery in central Serbia.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Andras J. Riedlmayer explained what these chilling words represented in a journal article, “Crimes of War and Crimes of Peace: Destruction of Libraries during and after the Balkan Wars of the 1990s,” *Library Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Summer 2007, p. 108 in “Preserving Cultural Heritage,” edited by Michele V. Cloonan and Ross Harvey. “Ethnic Cleansing – the mass expulsion of civilians, driven from their homes, robbed, raped, and murdered for being of the ‘wrong’ ethnicity and religion” (defined by N. Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing*, Texas A&M University Press: College Station, Texas, 1995)” It is also the “systematic and deliberate targeting and destruction of cultural, religious, and historic landmarks.”

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. Bevan writes that “the inconveniently visible architectural history of half a millennium of indigenous Muslim culture...in Kosovo had to be removed, along with its resistant people, if the dream of a Greater Serbia was to be realized.”

<sup>18</sup>Andrew Herscher and Andras Riedlmayer, “Monument and Crime: The Destruction of Historic Architecture in Kosovo.” Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Grey Room 01*, Fall 2000, p. 109. “When the Kingdom of Serbia wrested control of Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, it set out three justifications for Serbian rule in the province: the “moral right of a more civilized people,” the ethnographic right of a people who “originally”

Notwithstanding the communist autocrat Josef Broz Tito's granting to Kosovo of a separate and equal provincial standing in the Yugoslav nation in the 1970s, Milosevic revoked it, returning it to domination under greater Serbia even as the Yugoslavian nation began to disintegrate. He then instituted a system of ethnic apartheid, banning the teaching of the Albanian language and history in schools, firing Albanian-speaking teachers, and removing Kosovo Albanians from the provincial government. His political purpose for this was to entrench himself in power by manipulating ethnic dreams of Greater Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Christian identity. It mattered not that it came at the expense of the majority ethnic Albanian language identity. For those familiar with Iraq, think minority Sunnis oppressing majority Shiites. As Kosovo Albanians blanched at this second-class status, Milosevic sought to crush their opposition. Political dissidents, such as Ukshin Hoti, found themselves imprisoned for most of the 1990s.

Around 1992, the Kosovo Liberation Army formed as an armed insurgency following increasing repression and the evident failure of non-violent resistance to bring about change.<sup>19</sup> In 1998, open conflict broke out between the KLA and Serbian government forces. One of the KLA's early leaders, Adem Jashari, had planned and conducted isolated hit-and-run raids and ambushes on Serbian police and other Yugoslav security forces from 1991 through 1998. Hailing from the ethnically Albanian hamlet of Prekaz in central west Kosovo, Jashari lived in his family compound by day but slept at night 400 meters away atop the forested slope inside a hard-

---

constituted Kosovo's majority population, and the Serbs' historic right to the place which contained the Patriarchate buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church. While these buildings directly substantiated the third of these justifications, they also were scripted as evidence for the preceding two claims; the medieval architecture of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo testified both to the Serbs' level of civilization and to their past presence in the province." It was this precedent from which Milosevic "justified" Serbia's suzerainty – without the internal autonomy that Serbia revoked in 1989.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. p. 111



scrabble wooden hut, comforted only by a cheap, unadorned foam mattress for a bed. No Serbian security forces proved brave enough to confront him in his mountainside hideout.

This was the next stop on the cultural awareness staff ride. By early 1998, Jashari's attacks had stung the Serbians sufficiently for them to finally take concerted action. Two previous half-hearted attempts had failed. But, on the morning of March 5, Serbian security forces from the nearby city of Skenderaj, where they maintained a barracks, amassed heavily-armored vehicles around the compound. They lobbed mortar rounds into the Jashari family buildings. The Jasharis themselves armed themselves in defense with only small-arms weapons. The security forces demanded Adem Jashari's surrender but he would not leave. They promised his family safe passage from their home, but when a member of another branch of the family member stepped out, he was shot in the head.

If the KLA had wanted an "incident" that would unite Kosovo Albanians against the Serbian government, what follows undoubtedly provided the means. In what became known as the Jashari Family Massacre, Serbian security forces advanced and killed every living family member inside the compound. More than 50 Jasharis died in the onslaught, including the women and their young children, some as young as seven years of age. Adem perished as well. News reports later described Serbian desecration of the bodies.

Today, the Jashari Family Compound is kept just as it appeared on the third and final day of the onslaught, March 7, 1998. Protective scaffolding allows pilgrims to walk outside its various levels to view the destruction. There is an Albanian folkloric saying that a family needs three sons: One to take care of the parents. One to immigrate to a safe land. And, one to fight for his people. The Jashari who stayed with his parents died – with his parents. The Jashari who joined the fight for his people died - with his wife and children. The Jashari who immigrated – to

Germany – Rifat, lived. His son has returned to Prekaz where his children have repopulated the decimated numbers of the Jashari family.

KFOR visitors observe the magnificent commemorative site the Albanian-dominated Kosovo government constructed in their memory. A crimson ribbon spirals from the ruins of the family compound to their memorial site across the street to where 52 Jasharis fill three long rows of marble above-ground tombs. They are guarded daily by Kosovo security force soldiers. One can walk past the graves and up paved steps to view where Adem lived modestly in resistance each night for seven years.

From this Albanian Alamo, the ranks of the KLA swelled. Its coffers and arsenal grew along with its fighters. Albanians and Serbians battled in brutal fashion for the next year. Every KLA attack seemed to encourage a Serbian overreaction. A typical description is “if they kill one Serbian, we kill 100 Albanians” seemed pulled straight out of the National Socialist playbook of the early 1940s against partisans. Eventually the displacements, rapes, beatings, and killing of Albanians grew so large that European leaders conceded they could not ignore the carnage any longer. Forced by events to put action behind their moralistic “never again” declarations against holocausts, they demanded a negotiated end to the slaughter. But Serbia, perhaps thinking the Russians would aid them as they had in the First World War, rejected any deal. Russia declined and NATO subsequently launched its bombing campaign.

And suddenly, things around Kosovo make sense. The international airport named for Adem Jashari, the stadiums named for Adem Jashari, the sport arenas named for Adem Jashari, the street names, roads and highways named for Adem Jashari. Supplementing these are countless roadside memorial markers, with etched images, of various KLA fighters lost in the war to counter Serbians aggression in Kosovo.

And what of Ukshin Hoti, one of the political prisoners Serbia held? The ethnic Albanian philosopher and activist reached the end of a five-year prison in May 1999 while NATO bombs were still dropping. His guards relocated the professor of international law and later philosophy at the University of Pristina and founder of UNIKOMB, a political party of Kosovo. And he has never been seen again. Around Pristina even today, 16 years later, spray-painted stenciled messages read *Ku Eshte Ukshin Hoti?* Where is Ukshin Hoti? In an unmarked Serbian field, most believe.

The war's wounds on the Kosovo Albanians have left aggravating scars. Serbian armed forces and paramilitary forces damaged or destroyed 207 of the approximately 609 mosques in Kosovo, and more than 500 *kullas* (traditional stone mansions, often associated with prominent Albanian families), and historic bazaars.<sup>20</sup> Some destruction was clearly spiteful. For instance, fleeing Serbian police destroyed the Central Historical Archive of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, on the heels of NATO's entry to Kosovo, June 13, 1999.<sup>21</sup> Its records had stretched back 500 years.<sup>22</sup> In addition, in violation of the laws of war, Yugoslavian army troops occupied the Catholic Church of St. Anthony in Pristina and St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Gjakova, using both as command centers and installing an anti-aircraft radar in the former.<sup>23</sup> NATO would have been within its rights to bomb these, but it did not.

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. p. 112.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup>Riedlmayer, "Crimes": During the 11 week war, 65 of Kosovo's 183 libraries, a third of the total, had been completed destroyed by Serbian authorities. The combined loss to the Kosovo public library network totaled 900,588 volumes. In March 1999, Serbian troops burned to the ground the Islamic endowment of the Hadum Suleiman Aga library in Gjakova, which was founded in 1595. It suffered the complete loss of its 200 ancient manuscripts and 1,300 old printed books.

<sup>23</sup>Prosecutor's Report of the Expert Testimony of Andras Reidlmayer in the case of The Prosecutor (International War Crimes Tribunal) against Slobodan Milosevic. Section 2.5, Feb. 28, 2002, Case No. IT-02-54-T.

In a cynical attempt to deflect focus from its crimes against cultural facilities and violations of the laws of war, the Yugoslavian government alleged that NATO bombs had actually destroyed these buildings and others of cultural, religious and historical heritage to Kosovo. However, a post-war report from Andras Riedlmayer for the International War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague demonstrated conclusively that such sites were either totally intact or had suffered no damage from the NATO air strikes. Others, such as the Prizren League Building, had clearly sustained damage from the ground up.<sup>24</sup> Riedlmayer did find more than 80 Orthodox churches and monasteries, mostly from small villages, sustained damage *after* the NATO bombing, ranging from vandalism to structural damage to outright destruction, presumably by returning Kosovo Albanians.<sup>25</sup> KFOR has consistently closely guarded the major medieval Orthodox shrines from any retribution.

The war's scars are poignant as well. In 2015, to mark the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the NATO bombing and the liberation of Kosovo, the president of the nation presided over an open-air art exhibit. In the Pristina Stadium's football-field-width stood scores of clothes lines carrying skirts and dresses representing the thousands of women and girls raped during Serbian control of Kosovo. Roughly one hundred miles to the west, near the town of Gjakova, one can visit a reconstructed home, left partially shattered to show its former devastation in the war. Bronze busts and many photographs commemorate the life of its owner, a man called Ukshin Hoti. Where is he? In the hearts of his countrymen and the love they showed in creating a shrine

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. Section 2.1 This was a particularly vindictive action. The Prizren League Building commemorating a gathering of Albanians in the 1880s who declared their independence from the Ottoman Empire. It pre-dated Serbian's annexation of Kosovo by roughly 30 years. The Serbians destroyed it anyway.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. The Serbian Orthodox Church chronicles what is terms "crucified churches" in Kosovo since the NATO bombing ceased at <http://www.kosovo.net/crucified.html> It blames, probably with some justification, NATO forces for not protecting these sites from "Albanian barbarism."

out of such ruins to keep alive his memory. Stopover at such sites and exhibits as these bear witness to why Kosovo Albanians hold such unrelenting animosity toward Serbians.

But, what of the Kosovar Serbians? Those most notorious for perpetrating war crimes upon Albanians long ago fled back to the protection of Serbia proper. Those Serbians with, at best, a walk-on part to the atrocities, elected to stay. After all, Kosovo is their home, but a home where they remain a distinct minority. They huddle in guarded enclaves.<sup>26</sup> A 2015 Serbian movie, “Enklava,” portrays their dilemma. They are victims today of “soft” ethnic cleansing by the Kosovo Albanians who make life and movement difficult.<sup>27</sup> Their plight is comparable to American loyalists to the British crown in the 1780s. Britain viewed them derisively as provincials; the “home” isles were an alien land. So, Kosovo Serbians tough it out. They plant a

---

<sup>26</sup>Their plight and that of other non-Albanian ethnic groups in Kosovo is summarized in the Fourth Annual Report 2003-2004 of the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo to The Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, July 12, 2004, p. 18: “The most fundamental of the standards to be introduced in Kosovo is the guaranteed right of members of minority communities in Kosovo to live, travel and work freely throughout Kosovo, in other words the right to live a normal life in dignity under peaceful and undisturbed conditions. Even before the violent attacks in March 2004 against members of the Non-Albanian communities, the living conditions for the Serbian, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak and Gorani communities were very difficult, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on each community. Since the conflict in 1999, it has not been possible for members of certain non-Albanian communities, in particular the Serbian and Roma communities, to move freely in Kosovo. Instead, they have been confined to their homes, relying mostly on escorted transport for occasional visits to other places in Kosovo populated by minority ethnicities or to the administrative border with Serbia proper. The confinement of the above persons to restricted areas has far-reaching practical implications such as extremely limited access to employment, education and to most other aspects of normal life. At the same time, Serbian enclaves often do not have sufficient means of communication, ordinary forms of communication such as a proper postal service or telephone lines are often non-existent or interrupted.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. p. 19-20. The Ombudsperson Report calls it “the more or less latent discrimination and selective acts of violence against those members of the non-Albanian communities. In isolated incidents, Serbs were brutally lynched by a hysterical and angry mob. Albanians who refused to take part in the mass destruction of properties, churches and of public facilities were threatened... According to the Report on UNMIK issued by the UN Secretary-General on 30 April 2004, this onslaught was an organised, widespread and targeted campaign. Properties and churches were demolished, public facilities such as schools and health clinics were destroyed, communities were surrounded and threatened and residents of these communities were forced to abandon their homes. Minority areas were targeted, sending a message that minorities and returnees were not welcome in Kosovo. The Secretary-General saw this as a targeted effort to drive out Kosovo Serbs and members of the Roma and Ashkali communities and to destroy the social fabric of their existence in Kosovo. It also showed a lack of commitment among large segments of the Kosovo Albanian population to creating a truly multi-ethnic society in Kosovo. The conclusion reached by the UN Secretary-General supported the viewpoint of many persons in and outside Kosovo regarding the March events including the Ombudsperson himself, namely that they amounted to nothing less than a concerted attempt to conduct ethnic cleansing in parts of Kosovo.”

“peace park” on the Austerlitz Bridge to block access for Kosovo Albanian vehicles attempting to cross the Iber River to north Mitrovica. They build monuments to Kosovo Serbians who perished in the civil war.

Our staff ride stopped here as well, where a nearby statue to Isa Boletini, the Albanian nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter, born in the village of Boletin near Mitroviça. Boletini, who died fighting Serbians in 1916, stands watch over bridge traffic on the ethnic Albanian side. In June 2015, Kosovo Albanians reburied his remains in his home town, which today resides on the Kosovo Serbian majority side of the nation. His remains toured key cities around Kosovo when they entered from Albania. KFOR drafted response plans in case Serbians disrupted the procession but the bones passed through without incident. Today, because populations move, many Albanian graves rest on the Serbian side of the Iber River while numerous Serbian graves repose on the Albanian side. From such visitation accommodations may grow seeds of tolerance and respect for people from the other side.

Still, the living continue to grieve for those missing and presumable not buried in marked graves. About 1,700 Kosovars remain unaccounted for from the war. In Serbian-majority Gračanica, old women recall the 20% of these who were Serbian with signs showing photos.<sup>28</sup> Others affix individual photos to gigantic concrete letters spelling the word “Missing.” In this

---

<sup>28</sup>In answer to an emailed question, Pristina-based Igor Zlatojev, a Serbian linguist, noted several possibilities for whom the woman was mourning: 1) missing miners from the Belačevac/Bellaqevc mine <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/1624599-masovno-kidnapovanje-srba-sudbina-otetih-rudara-iz-belacevca-jos-uvek-je-misterija> ; 2) killed/missing persons in the March 2004 pogrom; 3) killed/missing persons during the war; 4) killed/missing persons after the arrival of the KFOR. “This might be very possible as these sorts of small protests are merely an expression of not being able to even know what happened to people, let alone change anything. Complete helplessness is how I’d describe it. If I had to put my money on it, I’d say this is the most likely message.”

they are in agreement with Kosovo Albanians who have done the same for their missing loved ones in Albanian-dominated villages.

In 2004, unfounded rumors spread that Kosovo Serbians in Mitrovica had used dogs to scare a 12-year-old child, who jumped in the Iber River to escape and drowned. Around the country, Kosovo Albanians rioted, burning or damaging hundreds of churches. KFOR provided minimal protection to the Serbian-majority town of Gračanica, where some Serbians fell victim to the rampage.<sup>29</sup> This is part of why Kosovo Serbians today loathe – and fear – Albanians. It is also why they appreciate KFOR's continued presence, and why the staff ride concluded here.

In hindsight, KFOR acknowledged its failure to protect the Serbians of Gračanica. Nonetheless, the KFOR commander *did* realize a threat to the historic 14<sup>th</sup> century Church of the Holy Virgin within the monastery of Gračanica. A Serbian monarch built the holy site in the early 1320s and UNESCO recognizes it as a world heritage site. Its surviving religious frescoes are brilliant to behold.

Now, recall how Serbians trace their identity to their Orthodox Christian religion. For Serbians to have lost this church to Kosovo Albanian fury would have been unthinkable. To fight

---

<sup>29</sup>Fourth Annual Report 2003-2004, Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo to The Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, July 12, 2004, p. 20: "Inexplicably, before and even after the March events, KFOR decided to remove checkpoints in certain villages populated mainly by Serbs, in spite of protests from the local inhabitants. In January 2004, the Ombudsperson asked the competent KFOR authorities for reasons for this removal of checkpoints. The KFOR Legal Advisor answered on behalf of the KFOR Commander, stating that KFOR's decision had been based in particular on improvements in the security situation throughout Kosovo. Only two months later, the violent events in March 2004 showed that these considerations did not entirely correspond to reality. Little more than two months after the March violence, Swedish KFOR decided to remove a checkpoint situated at the entrance of the Serbian village of Gračanica/Graçanicë. Two days later, a car drove into Gračanica/Graçanicë at midnight. Two persons stepped out and opened fire on a group of Serbian teenagers, thereby killing a 16 year old Serb. This incident again proved that the assessment of the security situation made by KFOR was not necessarily accurate. The above are only a few examples of the continuing problems faced by non-Albanian communities in Kosovo. Such a situation should not be tolerated by the international civil presence in Kosovo, nor by the Kosovan leaders, who need to commit openly and operate effectively, not only verbally, in order to ensure the protection of the human rights of all inhabitants of Kosovo, in particular people who are ethnic minorities in this province."

to protect it would have caused a bloody ethnic battle. And so, the KFOR commander ordered troops to protect the site. Today, concertina wire stretches the length and breadth of the walled compound. In western Kosovo, KFOR troops protect the equally exquisite Dečani monastery and Church of Christ Pantocrator, the biggest medieval church in the Balkans and which contains the largest preserved monument of Byzantine fresco-paintings.<sup>30</sup> Both monastery staffs effusively welcome visiting KFOR soldiers. “Come by whenever you like,” they tell U.S. Soldiers. They comprehend all too well that KFOR soldiers may be all that stands between angry Albanians and the survival of their historic medieval churches.

In such a nation overflowing with history, there is much to treasure and much to safeguard. Today, both Kosovo Serbians and Albanians recognize KFOR in general and American GIs specifically as honest brokers to ensuring freedom of movement, a safe and secure environment for all, and the preservation, by force if necessary, of their national, cultural, religious and historic sites. The staff ride touched only a portion of what Kosovo holds.

An early introduction to the bitter animosity between these two peoples, is therefore critical to apprehending KFOR’s mission. American Soldiers arrive in full Rodney King “Can’t we all just get along?” mode and all too often leave thinking, “These people are irrational and will always hate each other.” There is a third way, though. Through a staff ride that raises cultural, historical and religious awareness, KFOR troops recognize their place in between, along with a profound appreciation for what all the shouting is about.

---

<sup>30</sup>From the website <http://kosovo.net/edecani.html>, which notes, “The Monastery has survived after the Kosovo war (1998-2000) and the Brotherhood today lives as an isolated Serbian Orthodox island among hostile Kosovo Albanian Moslem population. This holy site survives only thanks to the protection of [KFOR] Italian forces which have blocked every access to the monastery. Beside all this, the Monastery still attracts many international visitors from the UN Mission and KFOR. Thanks to KFOR military convoys occasionally, the monastery is visited also by Serb pilgrims from Kosovo and Central Serbia.”



These cultural sites belong to Kosovo, of course, but in a larger sense they belong to all of us. Perhaps speaking everyone who value the inheritance of antiquity onward, one journalist grieved over the destruction of the four and one-half century old Mostar Bridge in Bosnia by Croat militiamen who felt it was not enough to kill Muslims, their relics had to be destroyed as well. She wrote:

Why do I feel more pain looking at the image of the destroyed bridge than the image of the [massacred] woman? Perhaps it is because I see my own mortality in the collapse of the bridge... We expect people to die. We count on our own lives to end. The destruction of a monument to civilization is something else. The bridge, in all its beauty and grace, was built to outlive us; it was an attempt to grasp eternity...it transcended our individual destiny.<sup>31</sup>

She cited Mostar, but in later years, she could just as well have been speaking of the Taliban's wanted destruction of gigantic carved rock Buddhas statues in Afghanistan or the stone Tomb of Jonah in Nineveh and marble pillars of Palmyra – or of the many vulnerable structures in places like Kosovo. These represent humanity's highest cultural achievements and such treasures must be preserved for the wonder and awe of future generations.

This template, therefore, retains resonance and resilience when applied to anywhere American forces are called for peace keeping or peace making operations. Iraq and Afghanistan have never been stable enough for this model to be implemented, but one day they may be. The KFOR 19 program could serve as a useful prototype.

For now and the foreseeable future, the flames under the Kosovo kettle remain low and the lid rests firmly on top. At the risk of some malicious ethnic entity stirring things up, KFOR stays in place. Its presence remains forgotten at home, joked about on satirical websites, and immortalized by cheesy Youtube videos. There is little martial glory to be gained from this

---

<sup>31</sup>Riedlmayer, *Library Trends*, p 120, taken from Slavenka Drakulic, "Falling Down: A Mostar Bridge elegy," *The New Republic*, Dec. 13, 1993, pp 14-15.

deployment. Nevertheless, given our nation's bitter sacrifices in Iraq and Afghanistan, a quiet KFOR legacy that enables people to enjoy the fruits of a relatively normal life is a rather noble bequest to have bestowed on the long-suffering people here.